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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 002718

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PORTUGAL FUMBLES ITS COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES'
CHAIRMANSHIP

REF: A. STATE 104493

[1](#)B. LISBON 2698

[1](#)C. LISBON 2589

Classified By: Dana M. Brown, Pol-Econ Officer, Embassy Lisbon
Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Portugal holds the 2007-2009 Chair for the Community of Democracies (CD) Convening Group, but its performance has been disappointing from the start. Portuguese MFA contacts offered us an overview of their leadership agenda for the Community of Democracies in 2009. MFA Deputy DG Antonio Ricoca Freire told us that it was unlikely that the GOP would coordinate anything more in 2008 on CD issues, but rather planned to carry out a concentrated burst of activity in the six months leading up to the July 2009 Lisbon CD Ministerial. Portugal aims to host one or two meetings with working group nations before the July event and seeks to staff the CD Secretariat part time by sending an additional staff member to the Portuguese embassy in Warsaw. We reassured Ricoca Freire that the Community will be important to the incoming U.S. administration. We believe Portugal has lost the focus and ambition it had when it offered to host the CD chairmanship and is now hoping to wrap up its term without expending much effort. End summary and comment.

Work to Start Next Year?

[1](#)2. (SBU) As a follow-up to U/S Dobriansky's meeting with Portuguese Secretary of State Joao Cravinho on Portugal's Community of Democracies (CD) leadership on the margins of UNGA (ref A), we met with MFA officials on October 30 to discuss Portugal's plans for the remainder of its 18-month CD leadership that will end in July 2009. Pol-Econ officer urged MFA's Antonio Ricoca Freire and Cravinho's Diplomatic Advisor Pedro Courela to appoint a CD coordinator quickly, to engage the working groups and to confirm the date for the Lisbon Ministerial that will conclude Portugal's CD leadership. Ricoca Freire reported that he would stay on until January since there was nobody to replace him, and he dismissed the idea of having the Portuguese embassy in Washington coordinate CD tasks because they "were not in the proper position to serve as a liaison." He added that the GOP would probably not convene a CD meeting before January due to the holidays and other priorities. Ricoca Freire reiterated his view that the working group structure was "stagnant" and needed to be revived after a group discussion. He suggested that January's meeting be an open discussion to decide what the CD wanted its working groups to tackle and said the newly-established working groups would have until May to finish their work.

Reduced Ministerial Expectations

13. (SBU) Turning to the Lisbon Ministerial, Ricoca Freire declared that it would take place in late July because "all other months are impossible." He explained that national Portuguese elections in October, the inauguration ceremony in November, and vacation plans in August blocked off several months in 2009. He stressed that the MFA did not plan to make the Lisbon event into a summit, as has been done in the past, because in the end only ministers attended the Bamako meeting in 2007. The Portuguese MFA does not want the Portuguese President or Prime Minister to be the only senior attendee, he said. He added that the July ministerial will showcase the new Geremeh Award and promote pro-democracy ideas, but he stressed that the GOP did not want to "pre-cook" conclusions in a cleared text before the meeting. Portugal will pass the leadership mantle to Lithuania at the ministerial in July and will thus curtail its leadership from two years down to 18 months.

Lack of Coordination with Secretariat

14. (SBU) Ricoca Freire acknowledged that the Portuguese had not had much contact with the new CD Secretariat based in Warsaw and promised that would change. His office requested an additional person for the Portuguese embassy in Warsaw to support the CD Secretariat part-time until July. He predicted that the position would be approved by the end of 2008 and the person could start working early next year.

Struggling to find Consensus Reaction

15. (SBU) Portugal recognizes that it has been largely unsuccessful in coordinating CD statements on several democracy crises this year. Ricoca Freire mentioned that statements on Zimbabwe and Bangladesh were both blocked by Convening Group nations, leaving the texts as gently chiding when original text strongly denounced anti-democratic practices. Ricoca Freire suggested that, rather than having the leadership troika issue statements on behalf of the Convening Group as USG officials suggested in New York, the CD should only issue leadership statements as a last resort. While he said the GOP would not reject the possibility entirely, he emphasized his hope that it would not be necessary for Portugal to issue statements without group consensus.

16. (SBU) Previewing Portuguese Foreign Minister Amado's question to the Ambassador (ref B), Ricoca Freire asked whether the Community of Democracies would be important to the incoming U.S. administration. Specifically, he questioned whether the next Under Secretary for Global Affairs would make it a priority and encourage greater participation. We stressed that democracy is a top priority in U.S. foreign policy, regardless of the administration, but Ricoca Freire implied that Portugal would not focus much attention on the Community of Democracies absent a strong push from Washington.

Leadership Lacks Focus, Energy, and Direction

17. (C) Comment: Two-thirds of the way through its 18-month chairmanship Portugal has accomplished nothing to date, and Ricoca Freire offers ever-weaker assurances that the GOP's CD leadership will begin soon. Meanwhile, senior officials such as FM Amado and Cravinho have admitted candidly that the Community of Democracies is not a priority for the GOP. Over the last year, we have raised the CD issue on numerous occasions and pushed the GOP to select a coordinator and begin concrete work immediately, but the GOP's lackluster responses indicate that Portugal will not assume the leadership that we envisioned without significant pushing on our part, if at all. The CD leadership role probably

conceptually appealed to the Portuguese a decade ago when it offered to lead the group, but the GOP has lost its focus and ambitions on the issue in the meantime. End comment.

STEPHENSON